



# FREDERICK COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Jan H. Gardner  
County Executive

OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE Raymond V. Barnes, Jr., Chief Administrative Officer

May 29, 2018

## An Open Letter to Frederick County Career Firefighters:

I want to express my appreciation for the exemplary service each of you provides every day to the citizens of Frederick County. You have much to be proud of including the recent recognition from MIEMSS as Outstanding EMS Agency in the State.

I agree that you deserve a raise and competitive wages and benefits. That's why the negotiated contract agreement included a commitment to transition to a new service-based pay scale and a salary improvement that, on average, is more than what is being provided to any other employee group. A salary improvement was offered to firefighters. Unfortunately, the union declined it.

I agree that you deserve to be able to take earned time off and to work in a safe environment. That's why I have added 75 new firefighter positions over the past three years increasing the size of the workforce by 22%. These new positions have helped us to move from station staffing to tactical staffing, delivering better service to the citizens and providing a safer work environment for you. At the same time, some of the new positions have been dedicated to improve leave impact.

Because I am uncertain what firefighters were told about the offer, I would like to provide some factual information about the proposed contract that was negotiated in good faith with, and verbally agreed to, by representatives of the career firefighters union and was fully funded in the FY19 budget.

**A copy of the proposed MOU is [attached in its entirety](#).** The contract proposed the following:

- Agreement to convert the existing pay scale to a service-based pay scale retaining the maximum step at 18 years. This new service-based pay scale was identified as the union's top priority. There was also agreement to use the DFRS seniority service dates as proposed by the union.
- A two-step increase towards placement on the new service-based pay scale.
- One anniversary-based step increase for the 100 or so employees hired on or after 11/30/15 even though they would otherwise not qualify for a step on the agreed to pay scale placement plan.
- Implementation of the holiday pay plan, which was [proposed by the union](#). This holiday pay plan helps to fund a portion of a step and will also allow more employees to take annual leave on these holidays than current policy permits.

Another important commitment was made to launch a comprehensive, independent study of firefighter/medic pay scales/benefits/work load with comparative regional organizations. This comprehensive information will help guide future efforts to maintain a competitive compensation package.

**It is important to note that negotiations ended with general agreement.** Union representatives indicated they would recommend the proposed contract to the membership. While the union did not get everything they wanted, there was expressed agreement. We were not at impasse.

**The holiday pay plan, which is a “give back,” was proposed by the union.** This was not an idea or suggestion that came from the administration. The negotiating team asked repeatedly if union leaders thought the membership would agree with the holiday plan and the administration was advised that this had been discussed and agreed upon by the members. This holiday pay plan or “give back” has now been described on the union’s Facebook page as “theft” or “stealing” of benefits by the very people who offered it. It is disheartening to see union leadership now describe something they offered in good faith as “theft.” It is inaccurate and a violation of trust.

Again, I do not know what employees were told about the proposed contract or why the contract was declined.

- If members of the firefighters union were told that negotiations would continue if the proposed contract was voted down, they were misinformed. The timeframe for negotiations is defined in the county code ([attached](#)).
- If members of the firefighters union were told that they would get a step increase like “regular” employees if the proposed contract was voted down, that was incorrect. This was not reflected in the proposed contract.

After the county council adopted the budget, I sent a letter to the union ([copy attached](#)) saying three things. First, I am disappointed by the union’s decision to decline the contract, the transition to a new service-based pay scale, and the offered salary improvement. Second, I remain committed to advance a comprehensive compensation study. And, third, I would continue to think about how best to proceed and would ultimately share my thinking with the union. This letter contains no threats or punishment to firefighters as stated on social media.

A salary improvement was offered to firefighters. Firefighters declined it.

The leadership of the union has decided to publish factually inaccurate and vitriolic statements on social media. This is not helpful, productive, or professional. Social media is not a forum for problem solving or for negotiations. I will not respond to unprofessional behavior. Ultimately, truth and facts always win the day.

I care about all county employees and I have a longstanding value to treat all employees with dignity and respect. I value the important and critical work you do as firefighters for the citizens of this county. I am proud of the high quality of service and care you provide to people.

I am disappointed that your leadership has decided to use negative and unproductive tactics and I no longer have confidence in your union leadership.

I hope this letter sets the record straight. I will do my best to support county career firefighters even if your leadership continues its unprofessional behavior and makes decisions that I believe are not in your best interest.

I have not yet decided next steps but will keep you informed.

Sincerely,



Jan H. Gardner  
Frederick County Executive